

Live in Living Color by vaughnicus

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Summary:

When you see your soulmate, you see in color.

Eddie and Richie are destined to be together. They know it, the Losers know it; the Universe knows it. But just before Richie's 18th birthday (when he'll get to See), Eddie moves away.

And then Richie leaves Derry.

And then they Forget.

And then two decades later, they remember. But of course, that's not why Mike's called them back to Derry.

1. The End to a Beginning

Author's Note:

Hello everybody. :)

Here it is, my second fic in this lovely, lovely fandom. This time long-form!

I already have most of this written, so HOPEFULLY it'll all be posted soon. This is unbeta'd so far. (If anyone would like to volunteer, you'll have SO much gratitude and probably things written for you.)

This has mostly been written in wild fits of inspiration over the course of the last few days. When I said Reddie and IT had taken over my life, I meant it, dudes. I haven't written like this in YEARS.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this!

The first time Richie sees Eddie, his world explodes in color.

Not literally, of course - that won't happen until his 18th birthday. But that's the thing - it *will*. He *knows* it will, more certainly than almost anything else in his life. And that's weird, because Richie has never been romantic about anything (not counting that one time he asked Lizzie to marry him in Kindergarten, because kids are stupid).

He's twelve. Stan's dragging him along to a thing that Bill's involved with - a fundraiser or something. Richie really hadn't been listening.

It's outside in a field, and there are makeshift booths set up everywhere, some selling food or crafts; some advertising "try your luck"-style games. There's what looks to be a petting zoo over to their right.

"What the fuck, Stan, is this a fair? Did Bill put together a fucking-"

He never finishes. He's just made eye contact with a boy standing a few feet away by some stand hawking mineral oils or herbs or some

shit, who cares - and everything had shifted.

“ - I *told* you, Richie, you never listen - what? What is happening? Why do you look like your dick just fell off?”

Stan is still next to him, continuing to talk; snapping in his face when he doesn't reply.

Richie shoves him aside, not even noticing his resultant squawk, and saunters over to the boy.

“Hi,” he says, and the boy looks at him with a weird amount of suspicion. “I'm Richie.”

“Hi.”

Richie lifts an eyebrow. “And you are...?”

“Eddie. What do you want?”

“Just trying to be friendly, Jesus.” Richie lifts his hands in a defensive shrug. “You here alone?”

“No. I'm with my momm- my mom.” He gestures to the booth, where a very large woman appears to be haggling with an aggravated vendor.

Richie smirks, lifting a hand to rub the back of his neck. “Shit, that's your mom? She never mentioned she had a son.”

“You've met my mom?”

“Yeah,” Richie says, a wicked glint coming into his eyes. “But you never came up-”

“What-”

“-you know, when I was fucking her last night.”

Eddie's jaw drops. Then his face turns bright red, and he shrieks, “fuck you!”

Richie bends in half laughing, unable to stop as Eddie just sputters. He

finally gets his wits together enough to spit, “Why don’t you just fuck off?!”

He turns to leave and Richie catches his sleeve, pulling himself together.

“Sorry! I’m sorry! I couldn’t resist!”

Eddie stops moving but only folds his arms and glares.

“Really, I can’t stop myself sometimes, it’s a known issue. My friends call me Trashmouth.”

At *that*, Eddie smirks. “Well that’s appropriate.”

“And I’m not!” Richie says, brightly. “But I am sorry. Let me make it up to you?”

Eddie is still glaring, but it’s softening. “How?”

Richie shrugs, looking around. “Buy you an ice cream?”

Eddie’s look turns somber as he glances toward his mom, who’s digging out cash to finally pay for her purchase.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Richie catches the look. “She’s the, uh, protective type?”

Eddie nods. “Yeah,” and then adds, “because she loves me,” as if to remind himself.

Richie just nods. “She wouldn’t like me, would she?”

Eddie doesn’t look too happy about it, but he shakes his head.

“Ok. I don’t wanna get you in trouble.”

This time, he turns to go, and this time, it’s Eddie who stops him. He holds up a hand for Richie to wait, and digs into his fanny pack - he’s wearing a *fanny pack* - before coming up with a notepad and pen. He scribbles something onto it, tears a paper off, and shoves it into Richie’s hand.

“Call between ten and eleven A.M. tomorrow - she’ll be out.”

Richie nods, very oddly out of things to say.

“I’ll talk to you then,” Eddie says, before quickly moving to his mother’s side.

Richie is just about to walk away when he hears it.

“Oh, Eddie-bear! There you are!”

He freezes. Turns around. Eddie’s still looking at him. He’s blushing. Richie grins, widely.

He mouths, “ *Eddie-bear?! ”*

Eddie flips him off.

And Richie laughs and laughs.

They spend five years together. They’re inseparable almost immediately, that first summer, and they only grow closer as the years go by.

It’s Sophomore year by the time Richie gets the balls to ask Eddie out officially. Eddie smacks him on the arm, asks what took so long, and says “yes, obviously.”

Their routine doesn’t change much after that. They still go to the arcade most days; the movies some of them. They end up at someone’s house nearly every night (usually Richie’s, because his parents really don’t mind, but they have to wait until Sonia’s asleep regardless). They struggle over homework and buy comics and fight over them. The only difference is the constant touching and hand-holding and kissing. And, when they get old enough, a bit more than that.

They fight, often. Their differences only grow with them, but they

never break up, or even stay mad for long. Their record was one week with Eddie not speaking to Richie, and that was over Sonia. A lot of their arguments are, in fact.

She's the one bad thing in their lives, but only Richie can see that. After Pennywise, Eddie had grown up a lot; believes in himself a lot more; threw away his gazebos, but he can't shake his mother's influence completely. He loves her, and she him, in her own way. (It's a *bad* way, Richie insists, and Eddie might even agree, but what can he do about it?)

She's the reason they can't be public after five years friends and two boyfriends. She's the reason they can only see each other on weekends and late nights.

And she's the reason Eddie leaves.

She finds out the week before Richie's 18th birthday.

Richie's older by two months, so he gets to know first. Not that he doesn't already. Eddie seems nervous but Richie has nothing but confidence. (Now, anyway. Two months down the line? Absolutely.)

They're sitting close together in Eddie's room, on his bed, shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip, reading a comic together. (They don't usually do that, because Eddie reads faster, but occasionally he'll relent. Because it's an important issue that he doesn't want to read first, or it's a special occasion, or he's feeling particularly needy for touch.)

The night's gone by perfectly, as it tends to. They're used to the routine by now; used to speaking in whispers and only walking around if absolutely necessary, and even then on tiptoe. But something conspires against them that night.

Richie fucking sneezes.

And it wouldn't be so bad, if he wasn't the one sitting by the lamp. His foot, kicked out by the force of his sneeze, catches on the cord

and brings the whole thing down with a terrifying crash.

They look at each other, frozen, for only a moment before they're in action.

Eddie shoves the comic book under his pillow, pulling down his covers and sitting in the bed, mussing his hair and eyes to make it seem like the sound woke him from sleep.

Meanwhile, Richie *leaps* off the bed and to the window, tearing it open.

He's halfway out when the bedroom door opens.

Sonia Kaspbrak stands there, hand on her mouth, tears already gathering in her eyes.

"Eddie? What's going on?"

Eddie is wide-eyed and pale. Richie can actually see the pulse beating in his neck. "It-it's nothing, Mom."

She puts her hands on her hips, making a pained noise. "Eddie-bear, you're lying to me! How could you? How could you lie to your mother?"

"No, Mom, it's not like that, I swear, I'm not - I'm not lying, Richie just-"

"I needed help with homework," Richie jumps in. "I didn't realize how late-"

"No !" The shout stops both of them in their tracks. Sonia is glaring at Richie with a truly surprising amount of vitriol. "I will *not* hear from you. You've been trying to corrupt my son for *years*. And now - now -" She begins to cry, thin tears making their way down wide, red cheeks. And then she *shouts* . "Get out! *Get out of my house!* "

Richie's eyes widen. He glances to Eddie, head cocked. *You okay?* Eddie just nods and shoos him away.

And Richie goes.

Sonia immediately runs to Eddie, grabbing him in her arms. “Oh, my sweet Eddie, what have you done? That boy - he’s tricked you, hasn’t he? What did you do? You can tell mommy, Eddie-bear.”

Eddie pushes her away, surprising them both. She nearly falls on the floor.

“No, Mom. Richie hasn’t *tricked* me. I’m - for fuck’s sake, I’m seventeen! I’m not an idiot, and I’m not helpless! I can make my own decisions!”

Sonia’s cheeks get impossibly redder. Her expression switches rapidly between furious and concerned. “You’re confused, sweetie. I understand, we’re both tense right now. Why don’t we go back to sleep and talk about this in the morning?”

“No,” Eddie says. He stands. “No. I’m not confused. Richie hasn’t corrupted me. I know what I’m doing. And I can’t believe you spoke to him like that. You’ve always hated him! Why?”

“Honey, I know what’s best for you.”

“ *Why*, mom?”

“ *Because he’s trying to take you from me.* ” The words hiss from her teeth, and she looks vaguely shocked afterward, like she hadn’t meant to say them. But she doesn’t take them back. She doesn’t take anything back. “You need me, Eddie-bear. I-I protect you.”

“Mom.” Eddie’s voice is low; angry. “I repeat: I’m almost an adult. I know what I’m doing. I don’t need your protection. And Richie is *not* taking me away. I’m not some weak-willed child following him around for no reason. I love him.”

Sonia gasps, hand to her heart and all. “You don’t! You don’t, you’re just confused-”

“I’M NOT CONFUSED!” Eddie makes his hands into fists, slowly breathing in and out, eyes closed, until he can control himself. “Stop saying that.”

There is a long, long period of silence.

When Sonia speaks, it's with something like resignation. With a teaspoon of satisfaction snuck in.

"We're leaving," she says. "Tomorrow."

Eddie's eyes fly open to stare at her, mouth agape. "What?"

"I'm getting you away from here. It's obviously unhealthy for you."

You're obviously unhealthy. There's something wrong with you.

"I am *not* going anywhere."

"Okay," she says, far too easily. "Okay, Eddie. Go to sleep. We'll talk about it in the morning."

Eddie doesn't want to. But it's been a long time since he's been this exhausted. And it's not like she can move the house while he's sleeping.

He falls back into bed and shuts his eyes.

Richie tries to stay away.

He goes home that night and stays in bed with his eyes open and heart racing until the sun comes up.

He stops himself from going back no less than five times.

He gets up in the morning, like normal. Eats breakfast, kisses his mom, grabs his bag and bike. He gets to school.

The whole ride, he's telling himself it'll be okay. He'll see Eddie at school.

Eddie, who is so strong. Eddie who's braver than he thinks. Eddie, who's mom has never actually physically hurt him.

He'll see him at school. He'll learn what happened in the form of a

ten-minute rant and he'll soothe the nerves with a kiss.

It'll be fine.

And then Eddie's not at school.

Richie lasts one period before running to his bike, hopping on, and riding faster than he ever has to Eddie's house.

He throws his bike in the street and races to the door, unable to explain the despair pulling at the back of his throat but feeling it nonetheless.

He knocks.

And waits.

He knocks again.

And waits.

A third time.

No answer.

He goes around to Eddie's window.

The curtains are open, which is strange. Eddie values his privacy. Richie cups his hands around his face and looks in the window, and feels his heart fall out of his chest.

No one is there.

Eddie's stuff is, though... or most of it. His bed is there with all the covers, but they're unmade. His room is still full, but his desk is cleared and... his bag is gone.

And, as Richie walks slowly around to the front of the house, a moving van pulls up, and two burly men walk right into the house.

Richie grabs his bike, but he doesn't get on. He starts walking. He doesn't know where. He doesn't even know what he's feeling.

He ends up at home, eventually. He ignores his parents angry(worried) questions, goes to his room, and shuts the door.

He sits on the bed, and he cries.

Richie doesn't have Eddie's new number. He doesn't have his address. He doesn't know where the fuck he went so he can't even *try* to look him up.

And Eddie never gets in touch.

No letters, no calls, absolutely nothing.

He's just gone.

Went and Maggie try, they really do.

They don't talk about it for a few months, and then they try to, and then quickly go back to not again.

They give Richie all their attention, and then they give him space.

They take him out; they buy him things. They give him an allowance and all but free reign.

Richie slowly stops talking to his mother, unable to handle the sorrow in her eyes.

The first time he comes home in the morning with lipstick on his collar, Maggie takes one look at him before going to her room and shutting the door.

Richie plays video games and pretends he can't hear her crying.

They move out of Derry.

It's for Richie's sake, no matter what his parents claim.

He's not close to Bill, Stan, and Mike anymore - not like he used to be. Ben and Bev moved away years ago. (They haven't heard from them, either.)

He still says goodbye.

Stan hugs him the hardest. When he steps away, his eyes are shining with unshed tears.

"Be strong, Richie," he says.

Richie shrugs him off but he can feel Stan's eyes on him the whole time he's walking away.

Richie moves away from his parents soon after they settle in Washington. He goes to California.

Somehow, he makes it. He starts a career. He gets success and manages to ignore the piece of his heart that screams at him that he's missing something.

Richie grows up, and he forgets.

2. Seeing

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone, still going strong on this baby. 42 pages so far! I'd say it's almost done, but you never know with these things. Hope you enjoy, and thanks for reading!

Richie's phone is ringing.

He pulls it out of his pocket, to the annoyance of his manager, and squints at the screen, wondering if it's another fucking spam call.

But... no.

Whoever it is isn't in his caller ID, but... that area code. He knows that area code.

It's five minutes until his show. He *really* shouldn't answer.

"Hello?"

"Richie?" The voice on the other end is *vaguely* familiar.

"Who is this?"

"It's Mike," the voice says, and a brief mental picture of warm brown eyes and the kindest smile shoots through Richie's brain. "Mike Hanlon." More pictures. "From Derry."

Richie's veins turn to ice. "... Derry?"

"Yeah, Richie. Listen, I..." Mike sighs, deeply and wearily. "I know you don't remember this, but when we were kids, we knew each other. You, me, Ben, Beverly, Stan, Bill, and Eddie." ... *Eddie*? "We made a promise to each other."

Richie's hands start to shake.

"You need to come home, Richie."

“H-home...” he says. It’s all he can manage. (His manager is staring at him with increasing panic).

“Yeah, Richie. Home. To Derry. Can you be here tomorrow?”

“Okay,” Richie says without thinking. “Yes.”

Mike breathes a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Richie. It’s really good to talk to you, by the way.”

“Yeah....” Richie says, and Mike makes a sad sort of laughing sound.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you.”

Richie very calmly hangs up his phone, strides out the emergency exit to the fire escape, and vomits over the railing.

Richie pulls up to the restaurant they’d all agreed to meet at, apparently. Jade of the Orient. It looks nice for Derry. He gracelessly gets himself out of the car, still staring up at the neon sign. He wanders up to the entrance, feeling like he’s in a trance that started when Mike called him, and nearly runs into a woman by the doors.

She’s beautiful.

She’s got red hair.

He can almost *feel* her spirit.

“Bev?” He says softly, and then louder, “Beverly Marsh?”

She turns to him, and Richie only barely holds back a gasp. Her eyes are cloudy, and they land somewhere vaguely to the right of his face.

“Yes?” She says, smiling.

“Bev!” He says, suddenly overwhelmed. They were all so *close* ,

weren't they? And he got to see them all again. "It's Richie!"

She beams, and it's nearly blinding.

"Oh my God, Richie! Hi!" She holds her arms out and he steps into them without hesitation, wrapping his own around her back. She's warm.

"Fuck it's good to see you."

She laughs lightly. "Wish I could say the same."

Richie pulls back, looking at her eyes again. "Bev..." He wants to ask *what happened*, of course he does, but even he knows that's a bit rude. "You look amazing."

It's then he notices the dog at her feet. A small-ish golden lab, wearing a vest that clearly says "seeing-eye dog" that's connected to the leash in her hands. How the fuck had he missed that?

"And *who is this?* "

"This is Viz," she says, and then giggles. "Short for Vision. Clever, I know."

Richie laughs. "Better than any of my jokes."

She scrunches her face up cutely in thought. "Richie... Tozier... fuck. Richie, did you grow up to be a comedian?!"

Richie's probably blushing, and in a fucked-up way is happy she can't see it.

"Yeah... yeah, I did."

"That's perfect!" She croons. "Of course you did, Trashmouth."

They both chuckle at the nickname, going a little lightheaded with all these memories returning.

It's then that Richie hears... something. A gasp is too weak a word to describe it. Some sound full of feeling, of... wonder. He turns.

And there stands a model of a man. Seriously, he looks like he stepped right out of the Captain America laboratory. He's hotter than pretty much anyone Richie has ever met, let alone had an actual relationship with.

And he's staring at Beverly like nothing else in the world exists.

Like she's sunrise clouds, simultaneously the most beautiful thing he's ever seen and liable to burn away at any moment.

It takes Richie a *painfully* long time to make the connection. But then he notices the man's smile; his eyes, and Richie *loses it*.

"Ben?!" He shouts, eyes dinner plates behind his glasses. "Ben fucking Hanscom?"

The man - Ben - finally registers Richie's existence and turns to him, smiling widely and immediately coming in for a hug. Richie can barely hug him back he's so off-kilter. He steps back and gestures at Ben's entire body, gaping.

"More like Ben Fucking *Handsome* , Jesus dude, did you make a demon deal or something? You look *amazing*."

Ben laughs, embarrassed. Beverly saves him.

"Ben?," she asks, softly, and he turns to her at once, again looking like he's somewhere outside of his body.

"Bev," he replies, words thrumming with something Richie can't quite name.

Ben reaches out for her but stops, his hand hovering somewhere around her face as he takes in her eyes, and his face crumples.

(Later, Richie will recall seeing Ben's eyes fill with tears. He'd thought it was a trick of the light, at the time, or the memories.)

"Bev, you..." He stops, and probably has the same internal battle Richie did. "Wow," he settles on. "I... I'm so happy you're here. We're all here."

“Well, we don’t know that yet,” Beverly says, gently. “Let’s go inside and find out, hm?”

Ben nods, realizes what he’s done, and says, “Yes. Let’s.”

Richie trails behind them, feeling strangely like a third wheel as they make their way through the restaurant. The hostess tells them where the rest of their group is, which means at least one person was already there. Richie supposes that would be Mike.

Who else was there, again?

Mike, Ben, Bev... Stan... Bill...

“You’re here!”

It’s Mike. He’s standing there with Bill, and next to them...

Richie loses all the breath in his lungs. His heart feels like it expands to fill his entire chest cavity. He’s rooted to the spot.

Eddie.

He’s the first thing to Light Up. His sweater seems to *shine* blue, and his eyes... they’re radiant.

His lips. Soft pink. His hair. Black like ink.

A wave of some unidentifiable force passes over Richie, and suddenly the room is *glowing*. It’s almost overwhelming. Bev’s hair, Bill’s eyes, the red of the decor.

All Richie can think to do is go to him.

Eddie is frozen, his mouth slightly agape.

Richie stops about a foot from him.

How the fuck do people deal with this?

Eddie speaks. “Holy shit.” It’s low and shaky.

Richie nods in agreement. At least he hopes he does. He’s not really

in proper control of his body.

The other Losers (oh, fuck, that's what they'd called themselves, wasn't it? The Losers Club.) are starting to notice something has happened, and in the periphery Richie can hear their greetings falter as they turn to look. He imagines it's quite the sight, two forty-year-old men just fucking staring at each other, not even really moving, probably looking quite shell-shocked. Kinda creepy, he thinks.

Eddie finally breaks. "Richie," he says, and grabs his jacket collar in a trembling hand. "Richie."

Richie swallows, just barely having the presence of mind to grip Eddie's wrist.

"Eddie," he says, and it's choked. A sudden lump is in his throat. "Eddie, I..."

And then Eddie slips away, and he looks - he looks *horrified* , and he's grabbing for something - his inhaler, he has an inhaler again? - and taking two long puffs on it. He grips his hair with one hand.

"Holy shit, Richie. Oh fuck. I - I forgot. I left, and I forgot. How the fuck could I forget?! Fuck!" Another hit of his inhaler. "We - we were..."

"We were in love," Richie finishes softly, hopefully so only Eddie can hear. And then, without heat, as he's only just remembering: "And then you left me."

Of all things, that seems to snap Eddie out of his spiral, because he looks sharply at Richie and lifts a hand in the air.

"Left?! I left?! I was fucking *forced away* , asshole!" Even as he's saying the words, his expression changes. It's like he's been slapped. "I... I remember. My mom..."

"Uh, guys?"

It's Bill. Richie and Eddie turn to look at the same time. The rest of the group is staring at them, bemused.

“What’s going on?”

There’s a mildly awkward beat of silence as they try to figure out the words.

It’s Ben who speaks up, in the end.

“It happened, didn’t it?” He asks, looking to Richie with the softest gaze. “You two... you just Lit Up.” At his side, Bev gasps, covering her mouth with a hand. “Didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Richie says, after a moment. “I guess we did.”

Specific phrases are lost in the round of exclamations that goes up. The Losers converge on them, beaming and laughing and looking almost too surprised. It’s Bill whose voice finally carries over the rest, and isn’t that just right?

“I remember now. You two. You were together, when we were kids. We should’ve known - *would’ve* known, I guess. You guys were inseparable.”

“You were so *cute!* ” Bev squeals.

“It was actually a little gross,” Mike contributes, and everyone laughs.

Right before they’re about to sit down and talk like normal people, Richie feels a firm hand on his shoulder.

“Congratulations, Richie.” It’s Ben. “I’m so happy for you two.”

Richie turns to face him, and Ben looks like he’s about to cry, but he’s smiling.

“Thanks, man.” Richie glances at Bev, a memory tugging at the center of his brain but refusing to surface. “Are you-”

Ben moves away before he can finish, taking a seat at the table.

Richie and Eddie, of course, sit beside each other.

Ben sits beside Eddie, Mike beside Ben, Bill beside Mike, and Bev last, with an empty chair to her left. They all just... dismiss it at first.

They order drinks and then food, and it's between the delivery of those things when Richie notices, and wonders how it took so long.

"Eddie," he says, and something in his voice makes conversation stop. His gaze is fixed on Eddie's left hand. "... you're married?"

Eddie looks down at his ring and goes pale, as if he'd forgotten all about it. He rubs it with his other hand, brow creasing.

"Um... yeah. I am."

Someone, somewhere, says "fuck," very quietly.

Richie doesn't know what to say. It feels like his heart is very slowly melting into his stomach.

Ben breaks the silence once again.

"Well, you know," he says, "these things happen. Any Unlit couple knows they could have an expiration date. I'm... I'm sure they'll understand."

Eddie chuckles bitterly. "She's not really the understanding type."

"You married a woman?"

Richie is more surprised than anything, though the voice he hears come out of his mouth sounds a little bitter. He knows it's not just straight and gay - obviously, he knows this - maybe Eddie's bi. Or something else. It doesn't matter, anyway, Richie just... wasn't expecting this. And maybe, just maybe, some small and hardened part of him wonders why *Eddie* was able to move on. *How* Eddie was able to move on, and find someone, and not constantly feel like he was missing something; like every partner he tried to be with couldn't measure up to some shadow in his mind.

And an even smaller part is angry at the realization that *he waited*. Over twenty years he waited for Eddie without even remembering who he was, and Eddie hadn't.

“I did,” Eddie finally responds, and keeps his mouth open like he’s going to say more, but nothing comes out.

Richie has so many questions. And, God, he *needs* them to be answered, but not here.

He turns away from Eddie to the rest of the group, forces a smile, and says, “so who else went and got themselves hitched?”

It’s an obvious way to not exactly change the subject, but get the spotlight off of himself and Eddie, and break the tension that had settled over their table. No one is unkind enough to call him out on it.

Richie continues in this vein for the rest of the meal, settling comfortably back into being the jokester and steadfastly ignoring Eddie’s weak attempts to get his attention. He’s not cold or strong enough to avoid looking at the man, but he doesn’t make eye contact and he doesn’t touch. There’s a cold knot in his chest that he tries desperately to warm with every shot and beer he works his way through. But every time it loosens, he catches a glimpse of the ring on Eddie’s finger and it comes right back at full strength.

“So is Stan coming, or what?”

Richie chuckles, both at Ben’s attempt to stop Richie from gushing over his looks and in response to the question.

“What? That guy’s a pussy, no way he’ll show up.”

“Fuck you too, Rich.”

Richie jumps, and then turns around in his chair to see Stan, standing there with a smirk on his face.

“Oh shit! Hey buddy!”

Richie gets out of his chair to hug Stan, who rolls his eyes but returns the embrace. He takes a seat beside Richie, and as he’s sitting down, his shirt sleeve rides up and Richie spots a small bandage on one of his wrists.

Everyone's saying their hellos now. Eddie leans across Richie to get a hand on Stan's shoulder, dragging his entire torso across Richie's chest, and Richie's stomach cramps up. He scoots his chair back and tries to breathe deeply, which is hard when Eddie looks as hurt as he does.

Later, Richie thinks. We'll talk about it.

But he's not really sure what there is to talk about. Eddie is married. Despite what Ben says, that's not exactly something they can just move past. It's Eddie, after all, and anyone he's married must be great. They must be in love. Eddie wouldn't settle for less. And Richie's supposed to get in the middle of that? Because some... some force they know nothing about says so?

Lost in his thoughts as he is, it takes a moment for Richie to realize their fortune cookies are vibrating. Everyone else is already staring at them, faces pale, some starting to back away.

And then they break open and all fucking hell breaks loose.

3. Chapter 3

“The first words out of your mouth should’ve been, ‘Hey man, wanna come back to Derry and get *murdered*?!’ ‘Cause then I would’ve said no!”

Mike looks broken, and Richie would feel bad if he didn’t still feel like he was connected to a live wire, all nerves and anger and abject terror.

He turns and leaves, walking to his car, and he thinks he can hear everyone else agreeing behind him, which is cool, because he actually really doesn’t want any of them to die.

There are footsteps behind him, and he ignores them because if it’s Mike he doesn’t know if he’ll be able to say ‘no’ again, but then there’s a hand on his shoulder and Eddie says, “Richie.”

And Richie stops. Eddie comes around to his front.

“Look,” he says, shifting on his feet. “I still want to talk.”

Richie moves around him, pushing the button to unlock his car, saying, “yeah, Eds, sure. Not here.”

“Right!” Eddie says, hurried, stopping Richie from getting in. “Just. Don’t leave without me, okay?”

No joke, it’s like someone punches Richie right in the heart. He sighs.

“I wouldn’t do that, Eds. I’ll be at the Town House.”

Eddie backs off, nodding, and Richie gets in his car and drives away.

Richie is in his room haphazardly throwing his stuff together when the knock at his door comes. He stills, takes a breath, and says, “it’s unlocked.”

Eddie walks in. He's practically vibrating with nervous energy. He paces for a minute, and then sits on the bed.

"You know, I—" He starts, and then stops. Runs his hands through his hair. "I don't really know how to do this."

"Then don't," Richie says archly, zipping up his bag. "Go back to your happy little life in the suburbs, don't tell your wife, and forget me again."

He's not looking at Eddie so he doesn't see the stricken look that crosses his face.

"What?" He says, breathless. "Is that what you think I want?"

Richie's brows fold together, but he carries on. "You're married, Eds."

"You're my soulmate, Richie."

And Richie finally stops moving, dropping the charging cord he'd been rolling up, turning to face Eddie.

"I know that *you're mine*, Eds. As soon as I saw you I remembered what I'd been forgetting all these fucking years. Remembered why I moved out of this fucking town. Remembered the reason no one ever worked out for me, because there was this little, locked away part of my brain or subconscious or whatever that was always, *always* comparing them to you and no one beats you, Eds. I fucking love you. I know that. But you... You went away, and you moved on. You married someone. Who I assume you love, because you're Eddie Kaspbrak and you don't settle for anything. And I'm not going to be the one to break up that relationship just because you can see a few extra colors now."

His hands are shaking. His throat feels tight.

He starts to walk into the bathroom to get his toothbrush and feels something small and hard hit his back.

He turns around to see Eddie standing, strung up tight as a cable, fists bunched at his sides. Richie glances to the floor. His wedding ring sits there, fallen from where Eddie had thrown it at him.

"I don't love her, you idiot." He looks like he might be shaking, too. "*First* of all, let's clear the air here. I didn't choose to leave you. My fucking psychopath mother drugged me. So there's that. And then once I was gone, yeah, I started forgetting. Just like the rest of you. But you were the last to go, Richie. I thought about you every single day until I started losing details, and then I tried to keep them, I *tried*, but you know how it went! I couldn't! You were a memory, and then a dream, and then a shadow and I *couldn't* keep trying to remember because it was killing me.

"So yeah. I 'moved on,' if you can call it that. I forgot everything that happened, dipshit. Forgot Pennywise, forgot you, and forgot about all that bravery I'd found. My mom put me back on my meds and I let her. So when I grew up and she was dying and she said there was this lovely girl who wanted to meet me and wouldn't I stay with her?, I said yes, because what the fuck else was I going to do. I wasn't happy. I've never been happy. Not since you.

"So no, I don't love her. And yes, I settled, because I have never been the person you see me as Richie, but at least when I'm with you, I can *try to be* . So this? The *few extra colors* ? Yeah, it's a big fucking deal. And yeah, I do love you. I did back then, and I do now, and even though we're *apparently* back here to deal with that fucking clown again, I am so happy that Mike called, because otherwise, we never would've found each other again. You *stubborn fucking asshole* ."

Richie stares, jaw dropped. He looks like an idiot, he knows, but he can't seem to shut it. He tries to take a step forward and fails, and then falls against the wall behind him and slides down it. And then, *horrifically* , he starts crying.

Eddie gapes for a moment before almost jumping at him, hurrying across the room and going to his knees. He seems to understand what's going on, and gently places a hand on Richie's cheek.

"Hey," he says. "It's okay."

Richie lunges forward and wraps Eddie in his arms, gasping.

"Fuck. I'm sorry, Eds, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have - I just -"

And Eddie holds him, saying, "I know, Richie, I know."

"I was never good enough for you."

At that, Eddie pulls back, fury written over his face. "Shut the *fuck* up, Trashmouth. You were then and you are now. I thought you would've gotten over that shit self-confidence by now."

Richie sniffs and chuckles. "I'm a comedian. Being self-deprecating is at *least* eighty percent of my job."

Eddie smiles softly, shakes his head, and then leans forward and kisses Richie.

It is gentle, and sweet, and full of twenty fucking years of longing, and Richie feels like he's skinless; like he's made only of nerves and Eddie is lighting up every single one with this simple act of contact.

Richie gets a hand on Eddie's face, feeling his cheekbone under his palm, and moves his lips against the other man's. They press together, moving soft and slow, and when they break apart the world has righted itself just a little bit.

"There," Eddie says, pecking Richie on the forehead. "Better?"

Richie nods, and smiles. And then he realizes that something else has shifted, and he leans his forehead against Eddie's with a sigh.

"We're staying, aren't we?"

Eddie rubs his back. "I think we should."

They stay there for another minute, and then Eddie stands up and offers a hand to Richie. "Come on."

Ben, Bev, and Stan are all downstairs when they get there.

"I saw it," Bev is saying as they walk down the stairs. "I saw you... in the bathtub..." She sounds like she's choking up, and Stan looks sick. "But it changed. You changed it."

Richie and Eddie make their way into the bar area and immediately

feel three sets of eyes on them. Richie lifts a hand in greeting.

“What’s going on?”

“Bev saw Stan die,” Ben explains without preamble. “She’s been having visions, and one of them from way back when we were kids was Stan.”

Stan himself lifts up his left arm, pulling a sleeve back to fully show the bandage Richie had seen earlier.

“Yeah,” he says flatly. “I sort of almost killed myself.” And then he adds, “but I didn’t,” with a little shrug and half a smirk.

Richie and Eddie stand there, processing. And then Eddie walks over and hugs Stan hard. Stan looks surprised before he relaxes into it, grateful.

“I’ve seen all of us,” Beverly says. “Die, I mean.”

“Jesus Christ,” Richie chokes out.

“But if Stan changed things....”

“Then we can, too,” Ben finishes, nodding firmly.

It’s then that Mike and Bill bluster in, talking quickly to each other while they barge into the lounge.

“Y-you guys,” Bill starts, and Richie frowns, wondering vaguely a) when his stutter had come back, b) when Richie had forgotten he had one, and c) if remembering it had brought it back for Bill. “W-we need t-to stay. M-m-mike knows h-how to beat It.”

He finally stills and takes a look around, absorbing the atmosphere of the room and sending a quick, confused glance to Mike.

“W-what’s going on?”

Stan sighs, and Ben restarts his explanation. Mike and Bill listen intently (seeming rather less surprised than they should, Richie thinks), letting Ben finish before starting to ask questions.

And then Bill says, “s-so what d-does that mean for the r-r-ritual, Mike?”

And Richie says, “ *ritual?* ,” all raised eyebrows and stark disbelief.

Mike shoots him a half-aggravated, half-anxious look, and starts talking. When he finishes, Richie is no longer the only one looking less than certain.

“W-w-we know how it s-sounds, guys. B-but trust me, it’s better if you believe him n-now.”

“That sounded a little ominous, Bill,” Richie quips. Bill just looks at him, and Richie swallows anything else he had to say.

“Well it’s not the weirdest thing we’ve ever believed, that’s for sure.” Ben shrugs. “What do we need to do, Mike?”

--

They’re in the Barrens. Richie’s not sure *why*, exactly, but Mike had said something about remembering their childhoods and considering how much time they spent in this place, he supposes it makes sense.

Eddie’s right behind him, trailing by only a couple feet, his hand occasionally brushing Richie’s arm as they walk. And that really does feel like childhood - Eddie following him, always at his back, a steady presence keeping Richie grounded.

Ben’s gone ahead now, taking point, and stomping around on the ground saying something about-

Oh.

Shit.

“I found it!”

Ben's voice comes from below ground, amplified by the space he's in.

That's right, the fucking *clubhouse* .

They all pile in, Ben hanging back by the ladder to help everyone down, but paying particular attention to Bev. He holds her steady as she climbs and lifts Viz down once she's safely on the ground. Bev flashes him a gentle smile and Richie can just about *hear* the thump of Bens' heart.

"Rich," Eddie says from beside him, pulling his attention away from the hapless lovebirds (because it's so obvious they are - or were - or will be. Whatever, it's confusing, but this pining of Ben's definitely isn't new, and Bev certainly isn't complaining about it). "Look."

Eddie gestures in front of them, to a rather small hammock hanging between two posts near the far wall.

As soon as he sees it there are memories flooding Richie's mind.

"Your ten minutes are up." - "I don't see any signs." - "It was a verbal FUCKING agreement!"

"Jesus, Richie, scoot over." - "Fuck off I was here first." - "Just make room, dumbass."

"This sucks. School sucks. Life sucks." - "Yeah. Can I...?" - "Get on, dummy."

"Eddie, I don't want to be just friends..."

"Oh, shit." Richie walks over, running his fingers over the old, coarse ropes. "This fuckin' thing."

Eddie joins him, smiling. "You were always hogging it. Always."

"Eh. Not that it mattered to you."

"No," Eddie admits, carefully sitting in it, wrinkling his nose as the dust rises around him but staying put. "It was a good excuse to get close to you."

As if to prove the point, Richie sits in the hammock, too. There wasn't room when they were kids and there's even less now, but he's bound and determined. He ends up half on Eddie's lap.

"This thing is 100% going to fall."

But he's laughing.

And it's then, Eddie giggling beside him, eyes bright, surrounded by golden sunbeams and dust motes, the feeling of their childhoods in the air, that Richie has another memory.

"Oh." The word falls from his mouth, the sound of a realization. "This is where I told you."

Eddie looks up at him, and he must have had the same thought, because he doesn't ask what Richie means. He just says, "that's right," stricken with nostalgia.

And suddenly they're seventeen again, and

the air is muggy and warm, even in the shade of the clubhouse, even with the cool earth surrounding them. It's late summer. Bill is at a family barbecue, Stan is at the synagogue, and Mike is working.

Richie and Eddie are alone, laying in silence in their hammock (and at this point, it really was theirs. The other boys used it occasionally but they'd apparently staked a claim, because whenever they were there it was empty and waiting for them). They're reading comics, occasionally flipping one around to show the other boy, or laughing softly at something, or nudging ribs or feet or faces to get a reaction.

Richie finishes his and puts it down, and suddenly all he can see is Eddie.

It's late afternoon, and the light streaming into the clubhouse is warm and golden. Eddie is still working on his comic, brow lightly furrowed as he reads, lashes almost touching his cheeks with his gaze cast down towards the book. He's flushed, and a little sweaty, and his hair is wild and dressed with twigs from their walk here. He takes Richie's breath away.

Eddie must sense him staring, because he looks up from his comic and frowns.

“What?”

He should make a joke. It's what Eddie's expecting. It's what Richie does.

He'll say something stupid and not funny but Eddie will laugh anyway. His nose will scrunch up and his dimples will stand out and he'll smack Richie lightly and call him an idiot, and-

“I love you.”

He doesn't even have time to be nervous. Probably because he really hadn't planned on saying that.

Eddie's breath catches. He drops his comic. He says nothing, and now Richie feels his heart begin to pound. He starts to move; to get up; he can't stay here if Eddie doesn't feel the same way. He really hadn't even meant to say it, shit-

“Sorry,” Eddie rasps. “I was waiting for a punchline.”

And then he crawls over Richie and kisses him.

“I love you too, you fucking nerd.”

Richie finds it hard to tell memory from present day for a moment, and then realizes it's because Eddie is kissing him. Here and now. He immediately relaxes into it, running a hand up Eddie's arm to rest on his shoulder, lightly squeezing.

It's completely innocent. Just like when they were young.

And just like then, that doesn't stop Bill from hooting at them, and Stan saying, “get a room, guys.”

Bev looks up from where she's been turning an old toy over in her hands and says, “what am I missing?”

“PDA,” Ben answers, and Richie scoffs.

“Eddie and Richie?”

Ben nods, and then rolls his eyes at himself and says, “yup.”

“Richie and Eddie making out in the hammock, what’s new.” Stan again, voice just as dry as when they were kids.

“We were not *making out*,” Eddie says, gesturing sharply with the hand not trapped between him and Richie. “That was like, a peck, come on.”

Everyone laughs.

And just for a moment, it really feels like nothing’s changed.

“Hey, guys, check it out.”

Stan is over by a rickety old table they’d put up to stash Richie’s cigarettes, shared booze, and some books and games. He’s got a coffee tin in his hands that has some faded packing tape on it. Richie can’t quite make out what it says. Stan peels the lid off slowly, and there’s suddenly something tense in the air, and Richie gets this *ridiculous* image in his head of Pennywise in there, all folded up like he was in the fridge at Neibolt, ready to spring out and devour them all.

It’s fucking terrifying.

But then Stan pops the lid off, and nothing happens except a little spray of dust. Stan’s face lights up.

“Ha.” He takes out an old shower cap, rubbing the thin and aged material between his fingertips. When he speaks, his voice is soft and young. “For spiders.”

Everyone falls quiet as the scene comes back to them. (“*We’re not afraid of fucking spiders, Stan.*”)

“Huh,” Mike says. “Stan the Man, I think you’re going to have a much easier day than the rest of us.”

Immediately questions come his way. Mike raises his hands to ebb the flow of words and begins explaining Tokens and How to Find Them.

And reality comes crashing back down hard.

--

Fuck this, fuck this, fuck this. Fuck this shit. What the fuck. Fuck this town. Fuck the clown. Fuck this shit. Hey, that rhymed, maybe I could make a song out of th- Nope. Focus, dumbass. Gotta get out of here. Grab Eds and go. Fuck. This.

Richie books it back to the Town House after his run-in with his worst childhood nightmares and memories.

This *fucking* town. It would have homophobes even though there were *literal soulmates* pointed out to you *literally in **vivid fucking color*** . But when had bigots ever bought into actual evidence? Or evolution, for that matter, and apparently this whole soulmate thing was some form of natural human evolution, or some shit. Richie wasn't a fuckin' scientist.

Whatever, not that it mattered to bible thumpers who always had and always would put their sacred fuckin' texts before human lives.

Whatever, whatever, whatever.

Fuck this.

Bev and Ben are sitting on the staircase when he barrels in. Looks like he interrupted something.

Whatever.

He pushes past them, ignoring their questions and worried looks. He's leaving.

Get Eddie, get out. Get Eddie, get out.

Ben follows him, heartfelt words pouring from his mouth and his hands turned up in supplication. Damn, he's persuasive. Even with

Richie ignoring what he's saying, the man looks so god damn *sincere*.

But he tunes him out, makes non committal responses, and continues packing his bag. When finished, he turns and makes a beeline to Eddie's room. They had talked about rooming together but hadn't actually done it.

He's about to pound on the door and then barge in anyway, but it opens before his hand even makes contact. Richie has to step back to keep his balance, and when he looks up, the blood drains out of his face.

"Eddie?!"

Eddie is bleeding. Like, kind of a lot. From his *face*.

There's movement behind him, and Richie is moving before he even realizes it.

Fucking *Bowers?! Seriously?*

The now-grown manifestation of all the human bits of his childhood torment has a knife sticking out of him, but he doesn't seem too fazed. He's climbing out the window. Richie can't even think, he's so fucking angry.

He lunges, but Bowers beats him by an inch, tumbling to the ground (aren't they on the second floor? What the fuck?) and running into the parking lot.

"Fuck you! Fuck you, you piece of shit! You've always been a piece of shit! God damn it, I thought you fucking died!"

Richie goes for the window. Not thinking, remember? He would go through if it wasn't for the hand at his collar, pulling him back.

"Whoa! Dude, I get it, but don't go breaking your legs for him."

Ben.

Bowers is well into the parking lot by now, but he turns back to leer at them. And pull the knife out of his own fucking chest.

Richie lets out a wild yell, no words, just pure anger.

Ben still has a hand in his collar, afraid he's going to go for the window again. But he doesn't have to worry.

Richie pivots, moving quickly past Ben and out of the room, looking wildly around until he spots Eddie on the floor, leaning against the wall. Bev is next to him, looking a little frantic as her hands flutter around Eddie's face. Viz paces between the two of them, whining.

"Iss my sheek," Eddie is saying, trying to guide her. "Lef' sheek. Is it bad? I need to know if iss bad. You can touse it. Gen-ly!"

Richie kneels beside Bev and takes her hands, guiding them to her lap. She smiles gratefully at him.

"It's me, Eds."

"Yeah, *I* can shee you, dipshit. Ish it bad?"

Richie would smile if Eddie wasn't sitting in front of him with a fucking hole in his face.

"Nah, s'nothing, Eds. You'll be fine. Bandid and a lil' kiss'll fix it right up."

Eddie laughs, and more blood spills out onto his chin, and Richie feels his stomach flip over. Ben is finally there next to them, and Eddie directs his next words to him.

"Little bag in my 'oom. Bedshide tabble."

"You sound like a drowning Sean Connery," Richie quips automatically, and Eddie glares at him.

Ben runs off to get the bag.

"Sorry, Eds. I'm sorry," Richie is saying. "I should've been with you, we should've bunked together, I should've checked on you as soon as I got back."

"Shu' up." Eddie rolls his eyes, able to look Done With Richie even

with blood running down his face out of a *hole in his cheek*. “Oo cannot possib-y make shis your fault.”

Ben is back, and handing antiseptic and a roll of gauze to Richie.

“Here, this’ll work fine until we get to the hospital.”

Hospital.

It’s bad enough to need to hospital. Jesus.

What if it wasn’t his cheek? What if Bowers wasn’t a psychopath who likes messing with his prey (influenced by Pennywise or not)? What if he’d gone straight for the jugular, or eye, or fuckin’ temple? Eddie needs the hospital, sure, but he could’ve been on the way to the *morgue*-

“Take over,” Richie says to Ben when his hands start to shake.

Ben does so, asking no questions. Richie sits back and takes Bev’s hand. She squeezes slightly.

“It’s not your fault,” she whispers. “He’s okay.”

Richie feels a tear start down his cheek. He kisses her on the head, and gets up to bring the car to the door.

--

“I told them we didn’t have anyone to call. Which is true, actually, none of us have your wife’s number, so...”

Eddie’s fine.

He’s sitting in an exam room, all stitched and bandaged up, waiting for some paperwork. Richie is sitting in a chair by the door, twisting his hands together.

“Yeah. Good. That’s for the best. If you’d called Myra, she - well I

doubt she would've come down here, but she'd be freaking out. I'd never hear the end of it. My phone - God, it'd never be silent. Which is not entirely unusual, but..." Eddie sighs. "Yeah. Good."

Richie's eyebrows have been climbing through the whole ramble.

"That's a lot to unpack."

Oh, if looks could kill...

"Shut the fuck up, I don't... I don't want to think about that right now."

And, God, he looks tired. Richie makes up his mind to go to him, fuck social niceties, fuck this town's opinions, when the door opens. A kind-looking nurse comes in, adorable in her patterned scrubs and youthful naivete.

"Mr. Kaspbrak?"

Eddie nods.

"Your papers are here. You'll find care instructions for your wound in this packet, as well as any prescriptions Dr. Wolton wrote for you. Did you take care of your copay when you came in?"

Eddie nods, again.

"Great, then you're all set. Free to go." She hands Eddie the paperwork with a smile, gives Richie a nod, and is out the door.

Richie slaps his thighs, stands, and winces at the pop his knees make. God, he's old.

"A'ight, buddy boy, let's get you outta here."

Eddie rolls his eyes, but lowers himself off the bed and leans on Richie.

They make their way to the waiting room, where Bev and Ben greet them with weary happiness.

"I'm glad you're okay, man," Ben says, gripping Eddie's shoulder. "We only thought to worry about the killer clown, not old bullies."

"The wonders of Derry never cease," Richie gripes, bitterly. "Let's get out of here, huh?"

When they all realize they haven't eaten all day, Ben drives them through Taco Bell, the singular fast food joint Derry has to offer.

Richie is glad they don't stop somewhere else. That they give into their hunger and don't bow to the need to eat somewhere with actual silverware. As it is, the decision to get fast food saves Mike's life.

The dull, wet *thunk* of that ancient axe into Bower's head sticks around in Richie's nightmares for a long, long time.

Then again, so does everything else that happens on their Reunion Tour in Derry.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

... so, hiiii. All two of you reading this: I'm very sorry. I wrote the first forty pages of this fic in three days and then fucking stalled for nearly a month. So that's my bad. But here's this! I hope you like it.

“Bill’s going off on his own. He says he’s going to kill It. Something about a kid. He was really upset, Mike.”

Oh, shit.

“No, no, we all have to be together for the ritual to work.”

Oh, no.

“There’s only one place he could’ve gone if he wanted to kill It.”

This is it.

Ben breaks many traffic laws on the way to Neibolt. If police in Derry have ever cared about anything, Richie would be worried that getting pulled over would be just as likely to make them too late as going the speed limit. Lucky the police are just as absent as every other adult in this goddamn town.

Bev leaves Vis behind in the Town House so he doesn’t get hurt (much to his displeasure), but otherwise, there’s no time for prep. They’ve got nothing but the clothes on their backs.

They actually get to the house before Bill goes in. By himself. The stupid, heroic fucking moron.

He looks angry to see them, which, rude. He goes on about how everything that’s ever happened is his fault. Bev tells him otherwise. Richie is moving, speaking, and thinking on autopilot.

“I don’t wanna die?”

“You’re lucky we’re not measuring dicks?”

“Let’s kill this fucking clown.”

As the words come out of his mouth, Richie comes back to his brain. He freezes before going in the door, remembering the last time they’d been here.

(Look at me. Don’t look at it, look at me!)

“Oh, fuck,” he breathes, shakily. He hangs back until Eddie is at his side, and then takes his wrist in a vice grip.

“Don’t. Die.”

Eddie looks into his eyes, and there’s a hardness there that wasn’t yesterday.

I forgot all that bravery I’d found!

Richie thinks that Eddie has never known how brave he’s always been.

“I won’t. And you don’t either.”

There are tears in Eddie’s eyes, but he squeezes Richie’s forearm with strong hands that aren’t shaking a bit.

“We’ve got a lot of years to make up for.”

He leans in and kisses Richie.

And, oh, how Richie wishes they were elsewhere. On his balcony in LA, reclining, Eddie’s lips on his as the city lights reflect in Richie’s glasses.

On the beach, sitting in ratty old camping chairs and holding hands just over the sand.

In New York, in Richie’s imagined version of Eddie’s house, a little dog at their feet and the world before them.

But here they are, in Derry, in front of the haunted house of their

hometown, about to face off with a cosmic horror.

Never has a kiss meant so much.

And then they go in, and it begins.

They're in trouble as soon as they walk through the door.

It's all too familiar. A sound or sight splitting them up, a door slamming. Screaming.

"Ben! Ben!!"

And then they become preoccupied, as a younger version of Stan presents itself, but only his head, rolling out of that *damn fridge* onto the floor and growing fucking spider legs.

"You could've saved me, Bill."

"I'm right here," Stan says, going to Bill's side and gripping his wrist. "It's lying to you. I'm right here. You *did* save me, Bill."

So it goes to Richie.

"What's happening to me, Richie?!"

And Richie knows Stan is at his side, he *knows* , but he still feels a wave of guilt.

Should've done something, should've made a move, it's all your fault...

And then Bill kicks the head out of his vision and he's released from whatever guilt-ridden, subconscious-driven trance he was in, and immediately, all he's concerned about is Eddie.

Who's in the corner, back pressed up against the wall, face drawn and pale and so scared. And Richie goes to him.

"Eddie! Are you okay?"

All he wants to do is touch; to reassure; to let Eddie knows it's okay, everything will be okay.

But then there's a string of something clear and viscous separating them, and Richie slowly draws his flashlight beam up it to find Stan again - the spider-y, body-less, rotting version.

"Oh, there he is."

Spider-Stan jumps at him, and Richie goes down.

He's sure, in this moment, that he's going to die.

Going out with his childhood best friend's corpseless head eating his fucking face.

And then he remembers his promise to Eddie, and he fights. He gets his hands up in Stan's face, digging into his eyes (*not Stan, not Stan, it's not Stan*) and when Bill comes in, pulling up while Richie is on the offensive, he thinks he has a chance.

And then not-Stan is gone, and Eddie's there, bloody knife in hand, leaning over Richie and panicking.

"Are you okay? Richie! Richie, are you okay? Answer me!"

Bill helps him up while Bev wipes the drool off his face (so apparently whatever horror they'd been going through in the other room is over).

"I'm fine," Richie says, struggling to sit up. "That's two demons you've stabbed in one day, Eds."

A weak chuckle rises from the group, and they move on.

Through the house, through the nasty basement, into the well, into the sewers.

They navigate by memory, as it comes back to them in flashes. Before now, barring a select few, the memories have actually been pleasant. Golden nostalgia for Richie to bask in. These, though. They're good, because without them, the Losers would be lost in the sewers. But they are far from pleasant.

Last time. They thought they'd killed it last time.

(But had they ever really thought that? Or had some part of them always known they'd be back? Why would they make that blood pact if they'd really thought It was gone?)

What about this time? Would they kill It? Could It even be killed? What if they were part of the cycle, coming back time and time again to defeat their worst fears, only to realize decades later they had never defeated anything?

“Rich.”

Eddie's beside him now, putting a cool hand to his cheek.

Richie realizes he's stopped moving. The rest of the Losers are a bit ahead, giving them space, but waiting.

“What's going on?”

“I think I'm having an anxiety attack.”

It's probably the most honest Richie has been since that day in the clubhouse he told Eddie he loved him.

Eddie just nods in understanding. He moves behind Richie and presses his chest to Richie's back.

“Okay. Breathe with me.”

Eddie takes deep, exaggerated breaths at a steady pace. Richie flounders for a moment, sure he'll never be able to breathe that slowly. His heart is kicking at his sternum, screaming at him to *turn around! Go back! Live!* But he ignores it. He focuses on the warmth of Eddie; the steadiness of him. Richie had always needed a rock.

“Come on, Rich. You can do it.”

Richie hones in on Eddie's voice. *Rich* . He'd always loved it when Eddie shortened his name, more than any pet name Eddie could come up with. He leans back into Eddie; puts most of his weight on the smaller man, and Eddie holds him tight.

Finally, Richie focuses on the pattern of his breathing. His lungs start

to loosen. Agonizingly slow. Eddie just rubs his chest, holding him close and gradually slowing his inhales until Richie is pliant in his arms.

“There,” he whispers, pressing his lips to Richie’s temple briefly. “Better?”

Richie nods. Rasps, “how did you know what to do?”

Eddie stills a bit, his rubbing motions stuttering to a stop before resuming. “You don’t remember?”

“Remember wha-”

“-please! C’mon, Eddie, you gotta calm down!”

They’re in the Barrens, somewhere. They passed the river a while ago, trying to shake off Bowers and his boys. They’re huddled against a tree, brush all around them, far from the path.

And Eddie can’t breathe.

He’s curled up on the dirt, inhaler god knows where, hands grasping at the ground as he tries and fails to pull oxygen in.

Richie is beside him, hands moving over Eddie’s body but afraid to touch. His glasses are skewed. His eyes are wide.

“Eddie, it’s okay! They’re gone! We got away, Eds, I promise we’re safe!”

Eddie makes a movement that could be a nod, but his body is shaking too hard to really be sure. He’s still making those hoarse noises that Richie knows means his lungs aren’t working quite right.

He panics for a minute. A good, full minute, sitting next to his probably dying friend(more, more than a friend, much more, you’ve never told him, Richie, he’s dying and you’ll never have been more than friends)before stilling, setting his jaw, and roughly pulling Eddie into his chest.

“Okay, motherfucker, you’re not dying here. Pay attention to me, Eds. Breathe with me, okay?”

And Eddie does, and eventually,

“It’s okay, Rich. I’ve got you.”

Richie nods into Edie’s chest. “I’m good. I’m good.”

Eddie nods to the rest of the group, and they carry on. Richie lets Eddie pull him up and into a hug.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Eddie is saying. Richie thinks, maybe, he’s trying to convince both of them.

And Richie lies, “I know.”

They catch up with the rest of the Losers. They make their way through the tunnels that wind and bend and turn more than sewers really should. They get to the cistern.

Memories.

Richie sees them all flinch.

Bev actually falls against the wall, and Ben is there before Richie sees him move.

“Are you okay?” He asks, with that sincerity only he can manage.

“Fine, I’m fine,” Bev insists, but her eyes are filled with tears.

Richie moves forward, pulling away from Eddie’s hand on his arm.

“Bev, it’s Richie,” he says, before taking her hand. “Listen, I just had a fucking breakdown like, two minutes ago. Whatever you’re feeling, there is so seriously nothing to be ashamed of. What’s going on?”

She trembles, briefly. And then she falls into his arms, forehead resting on his shoulder.

“The Deadlights,” she whispers into his collarbone. “I think - I think they did this to me.”

Richie almost asks what she means, and then he realizes.

And then he remembers what she had looked like in the Deadlights, way back then.

What her eyes had looked like.

“Oh, God,” he says. “Bev. I’m sorry.” And he holds her.

Eventually, and with regret, Mike says, “we should keep going.”

“Wait!”

It’s Bev. She pushes Richie away, kindly, and stands on her own.

“Before we do. Please... let me see you. All of you.”

Mike actually gets it before anyone else. He steps forward, takes Bev’s hand, and guides it to his face. She brings her other hand up as well, and moves them both gently over the contours of his face - his nose, his brow ridge, his jawline. Mike is smiling gently as she feels, and Bev smiles back.

“Mike,” she says. “You grew up so handsome. I’m sorry you had to stay. But you don’t show a day of the worry.”

Mike beams. He pulls her into a tight embrace, which she returns, and then he steps away.

Eddie is next. Bev goes through the same routine with the same pattern, her eyebrows furrowed at first as she takes in all his features, and then relaxed.

“Sweet Eddie. You haven’t changed much.” She brushes her fingers along his mouth, and then beside his eyes. “But you’re tired. The stress... you need to let go of it.”

Eddie hugs her, too, and she whispers something into his ear that the rest are not privy to.

And then it’s Stan, and Bev sees him, and she says, “I’m so glad I was wrong,” voice breaking in the middle of it.

And then it’s Richie’s turn.

He closes his eyes as Bev's fingers drift over them, mapping his appearance. He's suddenly self-conscious. He'd made jokes when everyone else had seen him for the first time in however many years. Now doesn't seem like the time, but he knows he's not in his prime anymore. If he ever was.

But Beverly is smiling at him, and her eyes are shining again.

"Well no wonder Eddie loves you," she says. "Richie Tozier. You grew into your looks after all."

And Richie laughs, feeling happy for a moment in a way he thought wasn't possible down here.

"Well, you've still got us all beat, Marsh."

She tosses her hair. "Don't compare yourself to perfection, Richie, it's not fair."

Richie laughs again, kisses her hand, and retreats back to Eddie's side.

This is it.

It's silly, standing in the entrance to a flooded cistern before fighting a killer alien clown, to be thinking of such childish things as love triangles, but there Richie is. He remembers the tension Bill and Beverly used to have, and he also remembers how keenly he'd related to the longing he had seen on Ben's face so often.

He's seen it again in the past two days, multiplied tenfold.

He hasn't felt the same tension between Bill and Bev, though.

And here it is, Bill steps up to the plate.

Beverly sets gentle, slender fingers on his face. She moves carefully, as though concentrating hard. Richie is sure she did the same for all of them, but he feels as though she's even more careful now.

But, in the end, the result is the same.

She smiles, hugs him, and says something about his looks. Something about his wife should be happy - oooh, shit. Bill's married. Richie forgot.

Well, hopefully that tension really is gone.

It's finally Ben's turn.

He's been hanging back, Richie notices. But he couldn't say if it was from fear or eagerness. Either way, he steps up to Bev confidently.

Richie can't read either of their faces.

But when Bev takes a staggered step backward, nearly falling into the wall, and Ben catches her looking shell-shocked but hopeful, Richie knows.

He recognizes the feeling he got just a day ago.

It's them. Ben and Bev.

They've Lit Up.

Somehow, and it won't be until later Richie wonders how Bev knows, but it doesn't really matter when they're melting into each other's arms and crying.

Much more romantic than he and Eddie.

He says as much, and Eddie elbows him in the ribs, not looking away from the couple, tears shining in his eyes.

Once again, it's Mike who is forced to say, "guys... We really do need to go."

There are no protests. They continue into the cistern; into the grey water that goes up to their chests or necks. They almost get to the center when Bev goes under, and they all go after her. Or almost all. Richie doesn't realize until he spots Eddie's dry hair that he didn't dive in, too. And Richie's grateful for that, really he is, but he knows Eddie sees him looking, and Eddie knows he knows, and Eddie's face is stuck in this pinched expression that means guilt.

He stands back when Mike, Ben, Stan, and Bill head down into... well, god knows where. They'd never gotten this far when they were kids.

"I can't," Eddie rasps. "I can't do it, I'm not - I'll get you all killed. Richie, you could've died - Bev, I - I couldn't move, I couldn't get in, I couldn't-"

Richie is on him at once, grabbing for that *stupid* inhaler.

"Gimme - gimme that. Give it to me, you turd!"

He shines his flashlight in Eddie's face. That does the trick.

"Hey," he says, suddenly feeling like a football coach on game night. "Hey, look at me."

Eddie does.

(Don't look at him, look at me!)

"Who took down a killer clown when they were fourteen?"

"... I did," Eddie mutters, not with nearly enough strength.

"Who stabbed Bowers with a knife he pulled out of *his own face*?"

"I did."

"And who kicked my stupid ass into gear yesterday, and my cowardly ass today? Who threw away his gazebo as soon as he learned they were bullshit? Who has always, *always* shown me what bravery is? And who's going to kick this *fucking* clown's ass for good this time?"

"I am."

Eddie is shining. There's no other way to describe it. Richie is lost in his aura.

Bev hands him the fence spike.

"Take this," she says, expression deadly. "It kills monsters."

“It does?”

“If you believe it does.”

And they head down into Hell with their chins high.

Below, Mike is already setting up the ritual. His ancient (stolen?) Native American vase is on the ground in front of him.

“The past must burn with the present,” he’s explaining. “Put your tokens in.”

And they all do. Stan’s shower cap, Bill’s boat, Bev’s postcard, Ben’s yearbook page, Eddie’s inhaler, Richie’s token, Mike’s rock. Things that shouldn’t burn, but do. And rather than feeling the memories burn up with them, Richie feels as though they’re more vivid than ever. Bad and good alike, alive in his mind.

Lights shine from above. It’s instinct to look up, and only Mike’s yell of “don’t look at them!” saves him from the Deadlights.

“Turn light into dark! Turn light into dark! Turn light into dark!”

It’s chaos. The seven of them there, in a circle, chanting to the fucking heavens, and Mike is speaking some foreign language like a Shaman beating away the night with a stick made of words.

It almost works.

Richie actually thinks it’s going to work, until Mike tries to cap the vessel, and a fucking balloon stops him. That damn red balloon.

And it grows, and grows, and grows.

They all scatter.

The explosion is deafening.

And then Pennywise is there. Bigger than ever, and Richie can see limbs through the frozen earth where the meteor impacted all those

many, many years ago. Limbs that don't look right. And when Pennywise climbs out... Richie would scream if he had any air in his lungs.

He's with Eddie. Thank God. Or... whoever.

They've been split up. The worst thing that could happen. But at least he's with Eddie.

And then they come to the doors, and Richie is *thrown* back in time, to the first time they'd come to Neibolt. How young they'd been; how innocent to think they'd defeated evil incarnate...

Eddie's voice, calling him away.

Richie's coffin.

A legless torso.

Eddie's disembodied head, puking black gunk onto the table.

Don't look at him, look at me!

Look at me!

"Look at me! Richie! *Look at me!* "

Eddie is in his face, spit flying down to Richie's collarbone.

"Goddamn it, Richie, look at me! Snap the fuck out of it! Richie!"

Richie grabs Eddie's hand from the air, where it's flying about next to his face.

"I got you. I'm here."

"Where were you?" Eddie demands. It's not the relief Richie was expecting.

"What?"

"Tell me where you went. Just now. We have to get our fears out in the open to defeat them, Richie. You gotta tell me."

"Everywhere, Eds," Richie says, angry in his attempt to not panic.

" *Tell me.* "

"In the fuckin' past! Bill and I, he did this to us when we were kids. This door thing. It's bullshit."

"What did you see?"

"What I saw then, man. Betty Ripsom's half-corpse, my funeral, your head, and you. Him attacking you. Last time we were in that fucking house."

"Okay," Eddie says, "okay." He gathers Richie into him, cradling his face in one hand. "Listen to me. I know you know this, but you need to *hear* it. He can't do shit to us, okay? Why do you think he's using your childhood memories? Memories of fear? It's *him* who's scared. He knows we can beat him. He knows, and he's trying to - to fucking regress us into kids again, because he can't scare us now. We know his tricks. He's trying to fuck with you now because he doesn't have any more tricks. Why else would he be using something he used back then?"

"Because it was *terrifying*, Eddie! Because it worked!"

" *That's the point!* He can only use *remembered* fear against you! Be with me *now*, Richie! Right now. I'm here. I'm alive and I'm here and I'm yours. What do you have to be afraid of?"

"Losing you."

And the truth of it comes up and chokes him.

"You're here now because I didn't lose you then, but it's *not* then. It's now. And if I lose you now - after - when we know, and we could have time - he could take you from me now, Eds. What the fuck do you think I'm afraid of?"

Eddie pulls away a touch. He's still holding the fence pike in his hand - Richie had forgotten about it. He grips it tight at the top and holds it out to Richie.

"This kills monsters," he says, and Richie hesitantly takes hold of the bottom. "If you believe it does."

He stares Richie down.

"If you *believe* it does. Get it?"

Richie looks into his eyes.

I forgot all that bravery I'd found!

... but it was never really gone.

Richie slides his hand up the pike until it's touching Eddie's.

"Got it."

"Look."

Eddie nods to the side, and when Richie looks over, the doors are gone. He looks down the tunnel. It's empty. He looks back at Eddie.

"I love you."

"I love you."

Eddie smiles fiercely.

"Now let's go kill this fucking clown."

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi, this chapter is mostly sex. You've been warned.

Also, it's over! Wow! That took way longer than I expected. I'm not the most proud of this fic *ever*, but... it's here. :) And I hope you like the end. :)
Kisses y'all

They walk back through the tunnel together, connected by the pike still gripped in both their hands, wincing in synch at the loud crashing and yelling that can be heard from the main cavern.

“God, I hope everyone else is okay,” Richie mutters.

And Eddie responds, “they are.”

They emerge into the cavern and Richie sees that he's right. They're all here, all seven of them, not unharmed but gloriously alive.

That could change quickly, though. Pennywise has Mike cornered. Mike, to his great credit, is standing where's he's been caught in the open and defiantly staring the clown down.

Pennywise rears back to strike.

A rock sails through the air and smashes him on his oversized head. Richie doesn't even realize he threw it until It turns and starts towards him and Eddie. He squares up.

“You wanna play truth or dare?” He says, recalling just hours ago in the park and feeling the rage flood through him. “Here's a truth: you're a sloppy bitch!” He grabs another rock and cocks his arm back. “Yippee-ki-yay, motherf-”

Alarm bells in his skull. Blinding lights in his eyes, and blankness starting to overtake his mind. He distantly feels the sensation of

gravity reversing and fear reaching its rotten arms into his chest.

And then there's an almost painfully strong grip on his wrist and he's being tugged back downward. For a moment, he's stuck between the power of a cosmic being from Hell and the love of his life in the most twisted game of tug of war ever played.

Richie can feel himself starting to slip away from Eddie's grasp.

Eddie growls, actually *growls* , and says, "no you fucking don't."

Without letting go of Richie, Eddie hefts the pike up. He holds it back by his head, and gathers up every second of the fear, the rage, the agony this fucking piece of shit clown has brought to them over the last three goddamn decades.

He screams.

"BEEP BEEP, MOTHERFUCKER!"

And he lets go.

The pike sails in an arc away from him, seemingly in slow motion, guided by an invisible and powerful hand. He could swear it grows as it flies through the air, landing squarely in the center of Pennywise's gaping maw. It snaps shut.

Richie falls back to the ground, hard, but he's on his feet. He blinks, shakes his head, blinks again.

Pennywise makes a horrible shrieking noise that rattles the stones beneath their feet and falls backwards onto a spike of his own making.

More shrieking. The whole cave shakes, and for a moment it feels as though it will collapse with them all still down there, successful but buried under tons of rock and debris.

The Deadlights zoom back out of It's mouth and spin madly above It, zipping around in frantic spirals.

Pennywise thrashes; screams; bats at the Deadlights like he's trying to

collect them.

And that's when Richie sees it: It's heart, on top of the spike, skewered. Torn right out of It's chest.

Something is starting to float... ash-like. Richie distantly realizes it's Pennywise, his body beginning to dissolve away.

Somewhere below them, someone yells. It sounds utterly triumphant. Bev catches on, then Stan, Mike, Ben... Eddie is the last to realize.

He killed It.

The Losers cheer as the monster that's chased them their whole lives fades away into nothingness.

...It's over.

Strong arms wrap around Eddie from behind him. He tenses, just for a moment, before Richie kisses his temple.

"Holy fucking shit, Eds." Richie moves around in front of him, grinning like he never has before, starting to bounce on the balls of his feet like a kid. "You did it! You fucking killed It!"

"Holy shit," Eddie agrees, and it hits him all at once. "Yeah I did! I killed It!"

They scramble down the slope to meet the other Losers in the middle of the cavern and stumble into some semblance of a group hug. It feels like he's in a dream as they all hang onto each other, shouting and crying, but in happy excitement rather than fear. Richie has a bizarre image of Eddie as a quarterback having scored the touchdown that won the Big Game.

He's never been more proud of anyone or anything in his entire life.

Just as it's really sinking in and they're all starting to check each other over, the cavern rumbles. The group's excitement dies down. A small tremble; a moment of quiet, like it was a trick... and then everything's falling apart. Quite literally.

Eddie catches Richie's gaze. His eyes are wide, his expression stuck between elated and terrified. Eddie grabs his hand as Bill yells, "RUN!"

As one, they move, sprinting out the way they came in. They weave between each other, someone new taking the lead every few moments, whoever remembers the way to go. Ben is holding Bev so tightly her feet are barely touching the ground. As they leave the cavern, he picks her up and carries her.

The cacophony around them is such they can hardly hear their own thoughts, let alone each other. But somehow, they stay together, dodging falling debris; scrambling over boulders; climbing up into the cistern and then the well as though something is lifting them up.

Richie notices, while all this is happening faster than seems possible, that he's not scared. And, seeing the faces of the others, no one else is, either. This is just the consequence of what they've done. And it's dangerous, but it's not Pennywise. And aside from all that... he has this *feeling*, no - *they* have this feeling, he can tell, like they're all connected somehow - this feeling they'll make it out. This certainty.

He barely processes any of this before they're all barreling out of the Neibolt House, straight through the yard and onto the road, where they all stop at once.

Seeing it all collapse is the most cathartic thing Richie's ever witnessed.

The silence after it's all gone lasts only a moment before Bev begins to laugh.

Ben sets her down and she stumbles a step away, bending over from the force of her mirth.

"It's gone, isn't it? It's all gone. I can tell."

Richie starts to chuckle, then. "Yeah... it is."

It's a snowball effect. Richie laughs louder, and then Eddie does, and then Bill, and soon they're all moving into each other and sort of collapsing to the ground and howling like they've just witnessed the

funniest goddamn thing ever. Richie thinks, if anyone sees them, they'll all be sent away.

And he really, *really* doesn't care.

He feels weightless. Thirty years of fear, gone.

They eventually collect themselves, standing up and regaining their breath, still leaning into one another.

Reality filters back in.

The town seems different. He can tell already. The fuckin' *air* feels lighter.

"Okay, party later, I need a fuckin' shower."

Eddie.

Richie cackles, loudly, caught off guard. So does Bev.

"No, nope, no more laughing in the street. It was fun while it lasted, but seriously guys, I need to clean up before I break out in hives."

That only seems to make it worse. Richie starts gasping for breath, and then Bill starts laughing, too. But they do start moving, in a rambling way, toward Ben's car. Richie pulls Eddie into his side, under his arm, and Mike takes his hand, and Stan's hand is on his back and everyone else is close, all of them keeping contact with somebody. It's definitely the *least* efficient way to walk, but breaking contact is not an option at the moment.

And Eddie, for once, seems content to wait for his shower.

--

Richie is waiting in the bedroom when Eddie steps out of the shower, looking like a whole new man. He's been waiting for a while, having

cleaned himself up in Stan's room. Everyone else has been slowly gathering downstairs.

"Thought you'd died in there," he quips as soon as Eddie steps into his vision.

"What, and you didn't come to check on me?"

Richie steps over as Eddie's drying his hair, gripping his waist with a smile. "I know how much you value your privacy."

Eddie turns in his arms to give him a gentle kiss. "I thought I'd never get it all off," he confesses with a small shiver, and Richie rubs his arms in response. "It took three washes just to get the *literal shit* off of me, and *then* I had to actually get *clean*."

Richie chuckles quietly, pulling Eddie into a hug. He lets his hands wander, gently caressing the planes of Eddie's back. His cheek rests in Eddie's hair.

"I know," he says.

He pulls away to let Eddie finish drying and sits on the edge of the bed. "You know," he says, toes idly brushing over the carpet, "you're amazing."

Eddie doesn't respond, starting to dress himself, so Richie keeps going.

"I mean that. I don't... I don't think I'll ever be able to tell you how amazing you are. You... you did it, man. You killed the monster. With a fucking *fence post*. Like, you're a goddamn superhero."

Eddie finally comes out of the bathroom in a fresh sweater and jeans, and sits at Richie's side.

"I guess so," he says, shaking his head. "That's gonna take some getting used to."

"What, being a superhero? I gotta tell you, Eds, spandex is *definitely* a turn-on for me, so-

Eddie hits him in the shoulder to shut him up. "Shut up," he says, for good measure. "Kiss me."

Richie does as he's told.

He turns, and puts both hands on Eddie's cheeks, and presses their lips together in a breathtakingly gentle way. Eddie grabs Richie by the shoulders and tilts his head, returning the pressure. Richie can feel... everything. The tiny muscles in Eddie's lips and jaw, shifting around as they kiss. The texture on his lips, the slide of chapstick. The smoothness of his freshly-shaven cheeks. The warmth of his hands; the lines on his palms; the pulse in his fingertips. Richie has to back away to breathe, but then Eddie is making eye contact, and the sight of his irises feels like a punch to the gut.

"I love you," he breathes out, unable to not say it. "I love you so fucking much."

"I love you, too," Eddie returns, sounding just as sincere; just as emotional. "I can't believe...."

We're here.

We did it.

We survived.

We found each other, again.

"Me neither," Richie says to everything Eddie can't get out.

All he wants to do is hold Eddie, so he does. He wraps his arms around him and squeezes, and Eddie does the same, around his middle. It's secure. It feels safe in a way Richie never thought he'd have. He's ready to sit there until Eddie pulls away. He's not expecting Eddie to turn his head and start kissing up his neck.

Goosebumps pop up over Richie's whole body.

Eddie tilts his head up, peppering kisses along Richie's jaw. He moans quietly.

“Eds...” He groans and pushes Eddie back a little. “Look, I. I’m basically a teenager right now, because I haven’t had sex in a fucking long time, and it gets me hot just to *look* at you, and everyone is waiting for us downstairs, and what I’m trying to say is if you keep touching me I might actually go off in my pants.”

Eddie snorts, pushing his face into Richie’s shoulder. “You speak so eloquently.”

“You know what you’re signing up for,” Richie says, trying to joke, but it comes out just a little more vulnerable than he’d like.

Eddie sits back and waits for Richie to make eye contact before saying, “yes. I do.” He kisses Richie once. “Spending my life with the only person who’s ever actually loved me, and who I love back.”

“Shit, Eds,” Richie says, already choking up. “Why’d you have to go all sappy on me?” He sniffs, rubbing at his eye. “Back at ya.”

Eddie laughs brightly, squeezing Richie’s hand. “C’mon. Let’s go downstairs.”

--

The atmosphere in the Town House is one of celebration.

As soon as Richie and Eddie come down the stairs, the others are shouting and pulling them in, Bill handing them both a glass of something brightly-colored. Ben pulls Eddie down onto the couch and Richie follows, taking a sip of his drink.

It isn’t long before they’re all sprawled over each other, making a human chain between the couch, floor, and chairs in the lounge. They’re all at least buzzed, laughing and talking over each other but understanding everything all the same.

They don’t talk about what happened. There’s no need to debrief. They all know it’s over and done with, and any scrapes, bumps, or

bruises have been taken care of.

They talk about their lives, the twenty-odd years they've missed. The good parts and the bad. Richie tells stories that leave everyone in tears of laughter, Ben describes some of his buildings, Bill talks about ideas for his new book.

Bev makes Ben start a group chat with them all in it, as soon as she thinks of it. They all text it immediately, as if it needs testing.

"I'm going to send so many memes," Richie crows.

They're happy. They're so happy.

It's long after the sun's gone down the energy starts to fade. Bill is the first to stand up and announce he's tired, and after that they all bow out, one or two at a time.

Richie takes Eddie's hand and pulls him upstairs, into their room, and onto the bed. Eddie has to get up to shut the door.

"Don't want to give our friends a show?" Richie needles, attempting a sultry expression.

Going by Eddie's laughter, he successfully failed.

"C'mere," Richie says as soon as Eddie's back within reach. "If I don't kiss you I'm going to die."

"Shut up," Eddie says, but it has no strength behind it.

He falls onto the bed and into Richie's arms, and they're kissing before either of them really even notice.

Richie immediately slides his hands up Eddie's shirt, tugging on it petulantly. Eddie rolls his eyes but strips it off, sighing deeply as Richie slides his hands up his torso.

"Fucking hell, Eds. You're *fit*."

Eddie shrugs him off. "I've stayed healthy."

He reaches for Richie's shirt, only to be fought off. "Nope. Changed my mind, I'm cold. Leaving it on. But I *totally* have a six-pack, too, Eddie, totally. No beer gut here. You'll just have to trust me."

Eddie raises an eyebrow. "Really. You're doing this."

"Don't know what you're talking about - hey!"

Richie finds himself beneath Eddie very suddenly, completely pinned. Eddie's sitting on his legs and holding his arms down via pure strength.

Richie means to say something witty, he really does. Something very clever and biting. But when he opens his mouth, all that comes out is - well, it could most accurately be described as a whimper.

He actually sees Eddie's pupils dilate.

Oh, Christ.

"Well," Eddie purrs, grinding down on him. "How about that." He leans in, pressing his whole body against Richie. "Now will you take your shirt off, or do I have to take it off for you?"

Richie blinks. He's pretty sure his brain has melted. Words seem out of reach.

"Is this all it takes to shut you up?" Eddie asks, and then tilts his head. "Actually, yeah, I guess it always has been. Good to know... or remember."

He takes his hands off Richie's arms slowly, smiling when Richie doesn't move them. He manhandles Richie out of his button up and then pulls up his tee, stopping when it catches under Richie's arms with a roll of his eyes.

"Okay, I actually do need some cooperation from you for this."

Richie snaps awake. That's what it feels like, anyway. He sits up and raises his arms so Eddie can pull his shirt off entirely, and then he sits back, feeling rather exposed for still being half-dressed.

Eddie rakes his eyes up and down his torso, lifting an eyebrow.

“Please, please tell me you weren’t actually insecure about this. Please, Richie.” He pinches the soft skin at Richie’s hip. “Like, are you fucking kidding me? I wouldn’t even call this a belly.” He notices Richie’s lack of response and looks up, brows all pinched together. “Richie. You are *so hot*. ”

“I, uh...” Richie flounders for a moment, unused to the praise. “I’m glad I hired that trainer, then.”

Eddie smacks him gently on the stomach and presses on his shoulder, getting him to lay back down.

“God, I missed you,” he says, dragging his fingers across Richie’s collar bones. “I didn’t know that’s what I was feeling at the time, but now that I have you...” A kiss to his sternum. “I missed you.”

Something warm grows in Richie’s chest, a fondness that he’s sure is showing in his gaze when he says, “I missed you too, Eds.”

Eddie kisses slowly down Richie’s chest and stomach, stopping just above the waist of his jeans. He leans back and undoes his pants, sitting up on his knees to take them off before tossing them off the bed. He does the same for Richie, stripping off his jeans and getting rid of them before pressing their bodies back together.

Richie gets his hands on Eddie’s hips and just feels him, dazed at the amount of contact. He squeezes his hips, drags his fingers over Eddie’s ribcage just to feel him shiver, grabs his ass and pulls him in so they can grind together. Eddie moans into his neck, his fingernails digging into Richie’s shoulders.

“Fuck,” Richie moans. “Eddie.... Do you... can you fuck me?”

Eddie makes a choked-off sound low in his throat, driving his hips forward into Richie’s. “I... yeah, yeah I wanna fuck you. Yeah. Do you have - I mean, are you prepped? Do you have stuff for that?”

“Yeah. In my bag.”

Eddie doesn’t ask why, or how. He gets off of Richie and strides to his

suitcase. "In here?" He asks, unzipping the front pocket. Richie doesn't even have to reply before he finds the condom, followed shortly by a little bottle of lube.

"Thank fuck," he says, bringing them back to the bed.

"After we, y'know, lit up or whatever, and had our little talk..." Richie trails off as Eddie slips his fingers under the waistband of his boxers. Eddie stops moving and gives him a little *go on* nod. "I, uh... I went to the pharmacy, just in - just in case." His voice gets higher and he trails off as Eddie pulls off his boxers.

He drops them to the floor and then just looks for a minute. Richie rubs his feet together, feeling as close to awkward as he can get with Eddie.

"Uh, Eds...?" He finally prompts, and Eddie shakes himself.

"Sorry," he mumbles, still staring. "I just, uh... I'm glad you're a bottom."

Richie bursts into startled laughter. "I'll be whatever you want me to be, baby," he manages, finally stopping his giggles as Eddie finally strips off his underwear.

"Let me look at you," he insists, stopping Eddie from laying over him again. "I've waited years for that dick."

Eddie snorts, again. It's already one of Richie's favorite things.

He takes in the sight of Eddie. His muscles, his chest, his face, hands, thighs. His very aroused and rapidly becoming neglected dick, standing flushed between his thighs, thick, just beginning to gleam at the top with precome.

Richie *aches* .

"Okay," he says, hands grabbing at whatever skin of Eddie's he can find. "Okay, I need you inside me now."

Eddie's next breath come out shuddering.

He plants himself between Richie's legs. He pulls out the lube and makes a whole show of squeezing the liquid out of the bottle and over his fingers. He lowers himself over Richie and reaches down.

He just uses pressure at first, rubbing two fingers around Richie's hole; getting him used to the feeling; relaxing him. He puts his first finger in while he's kissing Richie, deeply, entering him with tongue and finger both. Richie moans into his mouth, breaths starting to come a little quicker.

Eddie takes his time. He wants to know all of Richie. Wants to learn him, now; wants to know all the right buttons to push. The right places to go. He covers a nipple with his tongue and pushes another finger in, pulling them in and out slowly.

Richie has his legs splayed, his chest, neck, and face a rather becoming pink.

"Eddie," he says. "Eddie. Jesus fuck."

Richie can't focus on anything but the fingers inside him, and Eddie's body; Eddie's tongue in his mouth and on his neck and his nipple. He can't keep up, Eddie's all over him all at once. All he can feel is pleasure. He doesn't even notice the third finger until Eddie's suddenly deep within him, reaching for the place Richie knows will break him in the best of ways.

It takes a few more minutes, not that Richie can keep track, for him to find it, really find it and not just brush against it.

Richie arches up, pushing against Eddie, his head pressing back against the pillow. He can hear his own pulse, rushing in his ears. A coarse sound, almost a shout but not quite, pushes out of him. Eddie smirks and starts thrusting. Just with his fingers, and Richie can feel himself spiralling, his thighs tensing up, heat and pressure building up deep in his belly.

He comes to his senses enough to grab Eddie's wrist, pushing it slowly away from him.

Eddie pulls out slowly, eyeing him.

“You okay?” He asks, ready to stop if Richie needs him to.

“Yes. So okay,” Richie says quickly. Stopping is the *last* thing he wants. “I was just... I was gonna come like that.”

“And?”

Richie blows out an irritated breath. “ *And* I want you to *fuck* me. With your dick. Would rather not blow my load right before the main show.”

Eddie smiles at him, amused. “You know, there’ll be plenty of other times we do this.”

“Yes, and that’s like, still absolutely blowing my mind, but this... I want this. Tonight. Please.”

“Oh trust me, I want it to. I did get a little carried away watching you. You know you’re fucking gorgeous like that? With just my fingers in you? God, Richie, you’re - you were -” Eddie takes a calming breath, squeezing his hands into fists. “Okay, yeah.”

He grabs the lube from where it’s rolled away and pops it open, drizzling it into his hand until there’s a puddle. Richie watches, enraptured, idly running his hand along Eddie’s leg, as he jerks himself off, coating himself with the liquid.

And then he settles on his knees again, and guides himself to Richie’s opening. He lines himself up and then leans over, once again kissing Richie as he enters him. He pulls his head back as he bottoms out, making eye contact.

Richie feels removed from his body and wholly tethered to it at the same time. Everything feels slow and syrupy, heady, but he can feel all of it with intensity. Every thrust, every *shift* that Eddie makes, ricochets up Richie’s spine and flares down his extremities.

He’s not going to last long. By the looks of it, neither is Eddie. They’ve waited too long for this.

Richie shifts further down on the bed, wrapping his arms around Eddie’s shoulders and pulling him as close as he can, until he can’t

tell where he ends and Eddie begins unless he concentrates on the layer of sweat that lets them glide together.

He feels like he's falling in the best way. The room smears around him, colors bursting in his vision, turning Eddie tie-dye. The muscles in his belly and thighs tremble as he pushes up into Eddie. Pleasure thrums between his legs, waves in time with his pulse.

"Eddie," he whispers, roughly, teeth scraping over his jaw, neck, chest. "Oh fuck, Eds."

He's gone now, off the edge, no coming back.

He's expecting it but his orgasm still almost takes him by surprise. There's nothing to do but ride it out, moaning deeply as he feels his own release land on his chest. He's coming back to himself when Eddie comes inside him and suddenly he's up again, nearly choking on the pleasure as Eddie thrusts *hard* through his own orgasm.

Richie shivers as Eddie pulls out and slides off of him, landing bonelessly on the mattress.

For a minute or two, there's no sound in the room but their heavy breathing.

It takes longer than Richie remembers to catch his breath. It's been a while.

He turns to Eddie, smiling without thinking about it, and puts a hand on his chest.

"Well."

Eddie looks at him, lifting an eyebrow. "Well."

"That was good."

Eddie chuckles, turning on his side to make eye contact. "You know, it was." He takes Richie's hand in his own, tracing a thumb over the back of it. "But I think we can do better, don't you?"

Richie laughs brightly. "Let's find out."

“Let’s,” Eddie agrees. “But first, shower. And sleep.”

Richie nods, already feeling the shadow of weariness creeping up on him. When Eddie stands and heads for the bathroom, Richie follows him.

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The first time Richie saw Eddie, his world exploded in color.

Not literally, of course - that didn’t happen until he was forty years old and standing in the middle of a Chinese restaurant in his shitty hometown.

But he always knew it would. And it did, even if it took a lot longer than anyone would’ve thought or hoped.

There’s a lot to still figure out.

Eddie has to break the news to Myra and deal with the fallout. Richie has to clean up the mess he left behind by disappearing in the middle of a tour. They still live across the country from each other.

But they know now.

And it’s weird, because Richie’s never been romantic about anything... except this. Capital K or not, Richie knows Eddie is his. And he’s Eddie’s.

And as long as they know that, everything else will fall into place.

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Notes for the Chapter:

My endings are about as good as Bill's. XD

Thanks so much for reading. Come yell at me at my
tumblr @jehansmuse

Author's Note:

THANK YOU for reading. Please tell me what you
think, if you're so inclined.